

VZCZCXRO0065
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHRO #0393/01 0591110
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 281110Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7291
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 0599
RUEHFL/AMCONSUL FLORENCE PRIORITY 2205
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN PRIORITY 8405
RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES PRIORITY 2354

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000393

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [XF](#) [UN](#) [LE](#) [IT](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY SUGGESTS IDEA OF LEBANON CONTACT GROUP WITH
BROADER MANDATE

ROME 00000393 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Acting DCM David D. Pearce for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) During February 22 and 23 meetings with senior Italian MFA officials, NEA DAS Robert Danin discussed the idea of an informal contact group on Lebanon to discuss implementation of UNSCR 1701's arms embargo. Danin suggested the informal group's members could include France, Germany, Italy, Spain, U.K., and the U.S. and meet in national capitals. The Italians suggested that they could participate in such a group if it broadened its mandate to cover the entire range of political issues related to the situation in Lebanon. MFA DG for Middle East, Cesare Ragaglini said the "core" of Lebanon's problems (including UNSCR 1701 implementation, arms-smuggling, and the Tribunal) can best be dealt with and understood within the context of Lebanon's current political crisis, resolution of which is a sine qua non for increasing the GOL's ability to effectively implement UNSCR ¶1701. End Summary.

Strengthening the Arms Embargo

¶2. (C) NEA DAS Robert Danin proposed setting up an informal contact group to discuss the UNSCR 1701's arms embargo provisions during February 23 meetings with high level Italian MFA officials (discussions on developments on MEPP and Lebanon in general will be reported septel). Danin met with DG for Mediterranean and Middle East Affairs Cesare Ragaglini, DCM for the Italian Embassy in Washington Stefano Stefanini, DAS equivalent for MEPP and BMENA Sergio Scarantino, Near East Affairs Office Director Luciano Pezzotti and Lebanon Desk officer Giorgia de Parolis.

¶3. (C) Danin told his interlocutors Lebanon remains a top priority for the U.S. and that we would like to do everything possible to help move the situation forward. Danin emphasized that the strength of UNSCR 1701 is that the onus for arms embargo enforcement is put on Lebanon's neighbors and suggested an informal forum to explore ways to fully implement the resolution. He therefore proposed setting up an informal contact group on Lebanon to exchange information and share views on UNSCR 1701 implementation. He suggested the group meet in national capitals and that the membership could include France, Germany, Italy, Spain, U.K., and the U.S. The agenda of such an informal meeting could include: increased intelligence sharing; border

monitoring; expanding UNIFIL's mandate; and increasing mechanisms for enforcing the arms embargo. Danin told the Italians that he had already discussed the idea with his French and German counterparts, who had expressed interest in the idea of the contact-group, but that both had suggested the group meet at the United Nations in New York. Danin, on the other hand, advocated meeting in national capitals with subject matter experts in order to ensure a more in-depth exchange of ideas and to avoid attracting too much attention as it is difficult to keep meetings or groups in NY 'discreet'.

Italians Suggest Broader Mandate

¶4. (C) Italian DG for Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Affairs, Cesare Ragaglini, expressed interest in the contact-group proposal but suggested raising it to the A/S level and broadening the group's mandate to discuss the overall political situation in Lebanon. Ragaglini said the "core" of Lebanon's problems (including UNSCR 1701 implementation, arms-smuggling, the Tribunal, government formation, and elections) can best be dealt with and understood within the context of Lebanon's current political crisis. The DCM from the Italian Embassy in Washington, Stefano Stefanini, also supported this approach, saying it reminded him of similar efforts in the 1980s with respect to South Africa in which like-minded countries got together in order to coordinate a consistent message to the South African government - a tactic which could also be useful vis-à-vis Lebanon. He added that the contact group could also be useful to avoid a decoupling of views by countries with troops on the ground (Italy, France, Germany, Spain) from those with interests in the region but not represented on the ground in UNIFIL (U.S., U.K.) Stefanini noted that broadening the scope of the

ROME 00000393 002.2 OF 002

group to include the political situation could serve as a further justification for not meeting in NY under a UN framework, but rather in national capitals.

¶5. (C) Stefanini suggested defining/limiting the scope somewhat by focusing discussions on the topic of 'How to move the political process in Lebanon Forward', thereby giving the discussions a framework broad enough to justify not holding the discussions in NY at the UN (alleviating French/German concerns of by-passing the UN) yet still focused enough to keep the group on track. Ragaglini suggested initial meetings be restricted to the countries proposed by Danin but expressed openness to broadening the membership at a future date if members agreed.

¶6. (C) Ragaglini argued that to focus discussions in the proposed contact group only on the arms embargo would be a mistake. While the arms embargo is certainly an important part of UNSCR 1701, it is unrealistic to expect full implementation until Lebanon sees some resolution to the current political crisis. Ragaglini urged caution in over-highlighting just one aspect of a complex puzzle that included not only weapons transfers but also overflights and the overall deterioration of the political situation in Lebanon. Ragaglini underscored that he in no way meant to downplay the risks posed by continued arms smuggling, especially since Italian troops on the ground in UNIFIL are directly at risk. However, in his analysis the crucial goal must remain Lebanon's stability.

Danin: Focus on the Concrete and Achievable

¶7. (C) Danin cautioned that by broadening the agenda too much, the informal group could lose sight of concrete achievable goals, such as discussing ways to enforce the arms embargo (sanctions committee/border monitoring/air UNIFIL) and run the risk of being seen by countries outside the

group as attempting to come together to secretly plot the future of Lebanon. He argued that more effective implementation of the arms embargo as envisaged under UNSCR 1701 could help stabilize the Siniora government and give him more room to resolve the government crisis. Danin shared U.S. intelligence reports (made releasable to Italy by the intelligence community) regarding continued arms smuggling across the Syrian border and told the Italians a DIA team would be visiting the week of February 26 to share additional intelligence with their Italian counterparts.

¶18. (C) Ragaglini thanked Danin for sharing U.S. intelligence and said he would welcome opening a diplomatic channel to share and evaluate such intelligence. He said he was traveling to Lebanon February 27 - March 2 and would be meeting with a broad spectrum of interlocutors. He said in addition to trying to ascertain information on the status of the Israeli hostages, he planned to look into why the LAF is cooperating less and less with UNIFIL. Ragaglini said the Italian UNIFIL commander had indicated two reasons for the LAF's lack of cooperation: logistical problems such as a lack of fuel and spare parts for vehicles coupled with repercussions from the tense political situation in Beirut.

Comment

¶19. (C) The Italians are clearly intrigued by the idea of an informal contact group on Lebanon, as evidenced by their request that Danin come to Rome for discussions on the topic. However, in contrast to their German and French colleagues, who wish to limit a Lebanon contact group to discussion of technical issues within the UN, the Italians are convinced that the only way that the group can be effective is to tackle the entire broad range of Lebanon's core political issues, not just one part of it. End Comment.

¶10. (U) NEA DAS Danin has cleared this cable.

SPOGLI